

We often hear that spending a few minutes each day working on a goal can bring about growth. The same can be said about our spiritual lives. Both at Advent and Lent if not at other times during the year, reading and reflection can help with personal growth. In this Advent season, these daily devotions are intended to stimulate thought about God's word. They are written from a layman's perspective with little more training than what many experience in their religious lives. They are offered with love and with hope, that by reading them, you will be motivated to think more about God, to pray more to God, and to draw closer to your loved ones.

Based on the Common Lectionary of Year C, the devotions continue through Christmas and into Christmastide then end at Epiphany. The writings are paired with a piece of visual artwork and a bit of music, most recorded on YouTube. My hope is that your day will be better for spending a few minutes each day.

Harold Frye, Ed.D.

**November 28 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Advent**

**Jeremiah 33:15 “...I will raise up a righteous branch from David’s Line, who will do what is just and right in the land.”**

When do we lose hope? The world still suffers from the pandemic that caused millions of people around the globe to die from a virus. Not since the Spanish Flu of 1918 had anyone seen a crisis of this magnitude. Some may very well have lost all hope, thinking that mankind would perish.

The people of Jerusalem labored under the catastrophes of war. The Babylonians had burned Solomon’s temple and slaughtered God’s people. But Jeremiah prophesied hope. A savior who was righteous from the inside out would be delivered to bring God’s promise.

As the road to Christ’s birth begins once again, hope remains that God has fulfilled His promise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul0cwM7foY4>



## November 29 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Advent

**Psalm 25:4 "Make Your ways known to me, Lord, teach me your paths."**

When the boys were growing up, they played hockey on teams that frequently traveled to tournaments. On a number of occasions, we found ourselves in situations that would have caused a sane parent to make a huge U-turn and go home. But not a hockey parent! We traveled paths across Kansas to Colorado in snowstorms and dust storms. On one trip, the dust was so thick we could see only the faintest glimmer of taillights ahead. Fog was a challenge, too. Returning from a tournament in Minnesota one night, again visibility was limited to the car's taillights ahead. Drivers operate best when they can see the road!

The Psalmist pleads to be made visible to God, to be shown what God's expectations might be for leading a righteous life. Long before God's gift of His Son, believers were desperate to be assured that God was with them, that they were visible to Him. Now that the expectation of the Savior's birth is upon us, trusting that God will deliver His promise and see us is our hope.

Just as seeing taillights ahead through the pinhole of light in the fog or dust, we hope that our sins will not prevent God from seeing us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9IUCHKYIG0>



**November 30 3<sup>rd</sup> Day of Advent**

**1 Thessalonians 3:9 “How can we thank God enough for you, given all the joy we have because of you before our God!”**

Most congregations have active prayer chains and, during regular worship, express “prayers of the people” for those who are sick, facing surgeries, and other challenges and hardships. Being prayed for isn’t an uncommon thing. Most times, if the prayers being lifted up are about us, we aren’t even aware of them. But we continue to believe in the power of prayer. Jesus set the example by teaching His disciples the prayer known as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Paul and Silas expressed their love for those in the new church at Thessalonica and praying for them.

Prayers also give praise to God for His abundant mercy and grace. Take a moment today to express your thanks and words of hope for those for whom you care.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YZZzgJB33E>



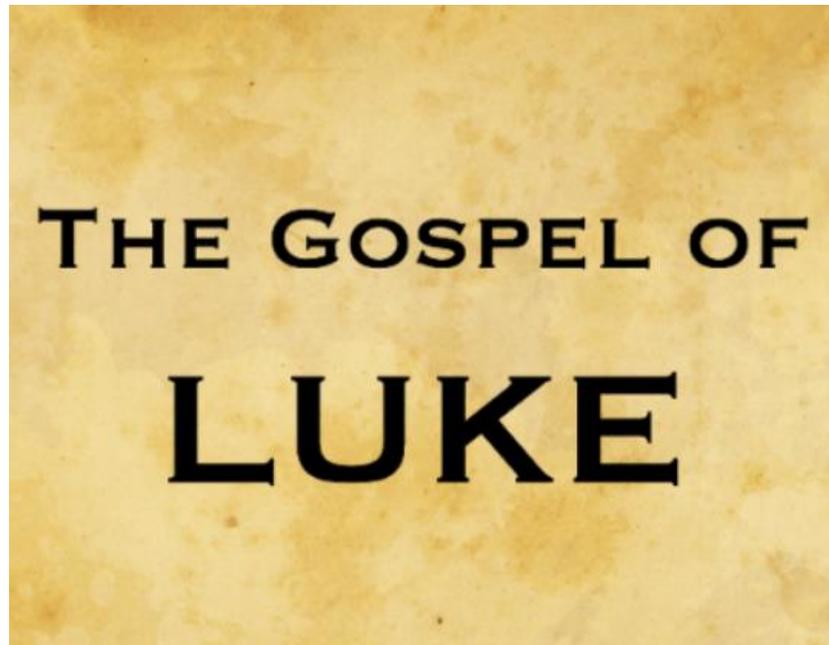
## **December 1 4th Day of Advent**

### **Luke 25:5 “I put my hope in You all day long.”**

Fall 1985: I left a wonderful job as a middle school principal to chase my dream in delivering professional development. The fellowship I accepted at The Learning Exchange provided support for half time and a search led me to Center School District in Kansas City, MO, where I served that year as Director of Elementary Education. The first assignment I was given was to create for the District a program in a new initiative in the State. The beta test had been performed the previous year in the Independence School District in what was called “Parents as Teachers.” The concept was somewhat novel, thinking that parents of children birth to three could teach their offspring anything. I suppose it was a revelation that children didn’t come with an owner’s manual. Subsequently, we hired and trained individuals to serve as parent educators who met in homes and provided parents with ideas about better baby and toddler education. The program concept was so strong that it quickly spread to other districts and states and is still in place today. Training recipients included caregivers since many parents weren’t the primary day-long support for children. Young children are fragile. They need to be closely supervised. They depend on adults in their lives to teach them.

And we are God’s children. We are fragile. We need to be closely supervised. We depend on God to teach us. When we think all is right in our lives, something comes along and we turn to God for help...not just in tough times, but at all times, all day long.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ak0OoFBw3c>



## December 2 5<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent

**Luke 21:36 "Stay alert at all times, praying that you are strong enough to escape everything that is about to happen and to stand before the Human One."**

Hollywood does its part to place fear in our minds. Movies like "Twister" and "Earthquake," "Independence Day," "Volcano," and even "The Birds" can cause viewers to tense up a bit. In most of these classics, the stars get through the disaster unscathed, at least for the most part. Are they stronger than others who perish? Are they in the right place at the right time? Is God watching out for them and not for those who die?

Perhaps, this passage from Luke isn't about a coming disaster, especially as it is placed in our anticipation of a Holy birth. Just maybe, our alertness and continued prayers will strengthen us to realize and to understand the magnitude of an event so unlike any other, so much beyond our belief and simple understanding that, unless we remain alert and on guard, we will miss it and forfeit an eternal relationship with the Savior.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCx4nTWY3C0>



**December 3 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Baruch 5:7 For God hath appointed to bring down every high mountain, and the everlasting rocks, and to fill up the valleys to make them even with the ground: that Israel may walk diligently to the honor of God.**

By now, most everyone has seen images sent back to Earth from the NASA rover Perseverance. My first sighting of a photo showed a range of hills and mountains behind the rover which, I thought, might provide an obstacle to travel. Further images showed deep valleys which also threatened movement of the rover.

The Book of Baruch is not a part of the Bible as we know it; rather, it is included in the Septuagint and other Bibles of faith. The writings of Baruch still provide words of theological guidance and wisdom as does this passage. The practice of making paths and roads straight and easier for travel, especially when anticipating the arrival of dignitaries, fits well into our journey to Christ's arrival.

We may not smooth away potholes and ruts in the road for the coming birth celebration, but we can clear our hearts and minds of those things that make our own travel to the manger more difficult.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APAdoD1vtHU>



## December 4 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent

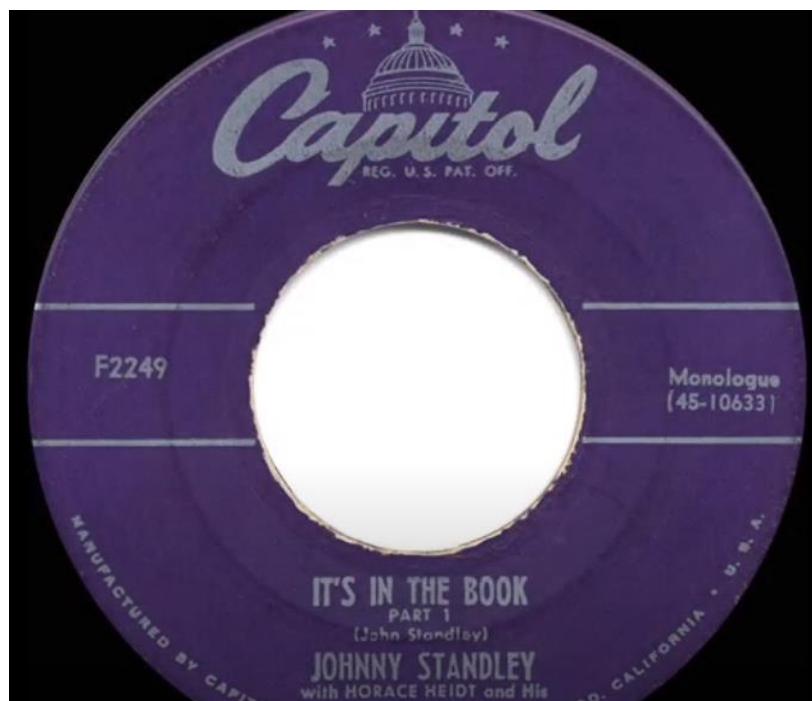
### Malachi 3:2 “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.”

In the early 1950s, a song that was popular and sung often around campfires and other less formal gatherings was “Grandma’s Lye Soap.” The song, made popular by Johnny Standley, was a mix of song and comedy. Audiences were entertained by his base humor as the song is presented, the reference to a strong soap that contained lye was raucously sung.

The scripture from Malachi foretells of the coming of the Messiah. People were urged to cleanse themselves in preparation for His arrival. To become purified was the goal so that one’s appearance before this Savior would be respectful and honor Him. The prophet Malachi compares purification to that of silver, refined of impurities in fire, and to wool and animal skins, purified by workers called fullers using strong soap containing lye that removed oils and dirt.

Cleanse your spirit in preparation for His arrival. And, in the meantime, enjoy this oldie but goodie.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnGQisfS8XA>



**December 5 8<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Luke 1:76 “You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare His way.”**

Kids and sports. Kids and anything. How many times do we see parents pushing their child to the front of the line? Dads who volunteer to coach so their sons can be the quarterback. Moms who construct dioramas far beyond the capability of any 4<sup>th</sup> grader for book reports. The lists are endless and the examples are numerous.

Zechariah could have been the penultimate of fathers. His son, John, would take upon himself a mission to announce the coming of Christ. He would baptize Jesus. Few fathers could foretell of such greatness for their child. The prophecy became real. John the Baptist was destined for a mission that would make any parent burst with pride. He would take on God’s mission.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEURoozc-1g>



**December 6 9<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

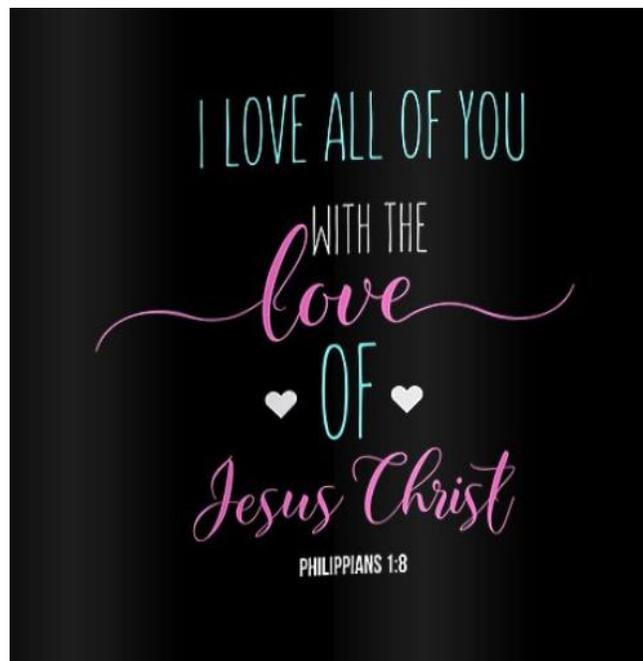
**Philippians 1:8 “God is my witness that I feel affection for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.”**

We were stationed in Augsburg in 1970 and learned that the “Passion Play” was being presented in Oberammergau, less than an hour’s drive from our apartment. The play is performed once each decade and we were there at the right time. Unfortunately, heavy rains and subsequent flooding prevented us from getting there (and a few unlucky travel restricted weekends). Since then, I’ve always wondered about the similarities and differences between the meanings of passion and compassion.

In tracing the origins of the word passion, it began as an indication of emotion, especially suffering, and referred to the death of Jesus. Later, wordsmiths described the difference between passion and compassion this way: passion is an internal feeling while compassion is an external one. Some describe compassion as deep sorrow, which isn’t exactly how Paul used it in his letter to the people of Philippi.

Whether passion or compassion, the blessing God brings to us is above all else.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp6aygmVzM4>



**December 7 10<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Luke 3:6 "All humanity will see God's salvation."**

Jesus is coming! Prepare the way! Be ready, for every man, woman, and child will witness the power of God's promise. Beyond seeing the fulfillment of that promise, every man, woman, and child is called to respond, stepping forward to assume the role of believer, follower, champion for the faith.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSODPhE-0ng>



**December 8 11<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Luke 1:78** “Because of our God’s deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us.”

“Sunrise, sunset...sunrise, sunset...swiftly flow the days.” I can’t think about dawn without that Fiddler on the Roof song entering my mind. That song, and hundreds of images of dawn bursting into a full blown day bring joy. The magic of a new day can’t be any more clearly comparable to God’s love for His people. He gifts us with dawn’s beauty, capping it off with marvelous and majestic skylscapes of color. In between, God watches over us as we attempt to lead lives filled with righteousness.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRsciuPOWW4>



**December 9 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Philippians 1:6 “I’m sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus.”**

Researchers Rodd Wagner and James Harter wrote in their book, “12: The Elements of Great Managing” that workers are likely to leave a job when their needs are not being met. Beginning with knowing what is expected on the job, their work discovered 12 factors or actions that cause workers to move on. They arranged these in a Maslow-like hierarchy. Most require that managers and supervisors stay on top of the worker’s needs so that job satisfaction creates positive outcomes.

Paul assures followers at Philippi that they will not be alone in their journey, that God’s gift of His Son was intended to provide a guide from beginning to end. What great satisfaction knowing that each of us is being watched from the day of our birth through eternal times until the Christ returns.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30Z-KH97DZQ>



## December 10 13<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent

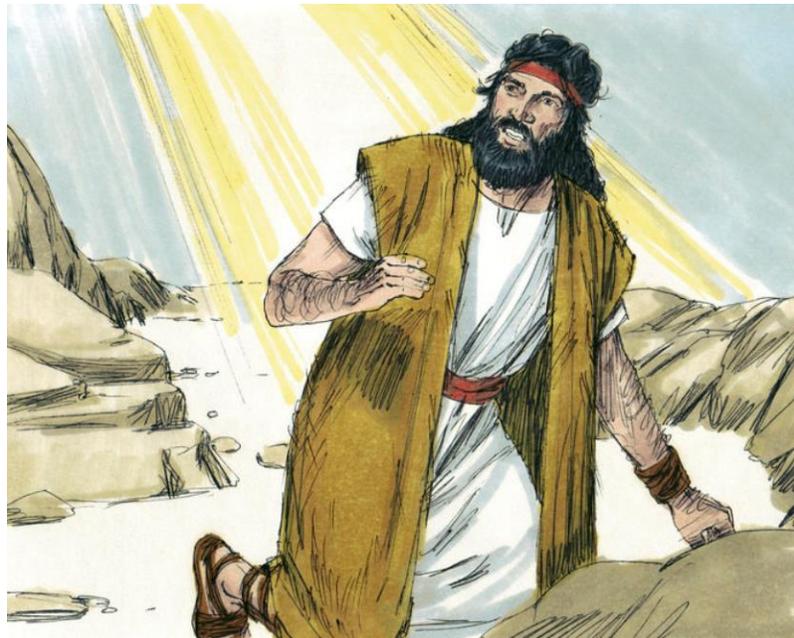
**Luke 3:2 “God’s word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”**

History is filled with a number of individuals who, without position or power, rose to become great leaders or heroes in their field. Harriet Tubman is such a person. Most know of her courage to lead escaped slaves as a “conductor” on the underground railroad. No one would have predicted that Harriet, born Araminta Ross, would become an icon of bravery and a leader in the abolitionist movement. But divine intervention isn’t surprising in the choice of Harriet Tubman.

Gospel writer Luke begins his third chapter by naming all the Roman and temple leaders in power at the time of John the Baptist’s ministry. The most powerful man in the world, Emperor Tiberius Caesar, was not called by God to carry out this mission nor were any of the other government leaders or high priest Caiaphas. An unknown got the call and got the job done. In the Magnificat, Mary notes, “He has put down princes from their thrones. And has exalted the lowly.”

The Word of God comes to the unexpected. God’s mysterious way.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2\\_30G2fJmU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2_30G2fJmU)



## December 11 14<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent

**Zephaniah 3:17 "He will create calm with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing."**

Often it is said that the only thing better than being a parent is being a grandparent. In this past year or so, I have been privileged to meet a couple of my grands early in the morning and take them to daycare and school so that their teacher parents can get to their schools on time. Once these bundles of joy are secured in their car seats, it's off to the daycare which is only a few minutes away then to the school for the car line. Those few minutes, except for sighting buses, are filled with singing and laughter. We sing all the nursery rhyme favorites and sing along to some on the radio. It's all the rejoicing this grandpa needs to start the day.

What creates calm more than love? What shows love more than singing? God loves you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLTu1xv2-US>



**December 12 15<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

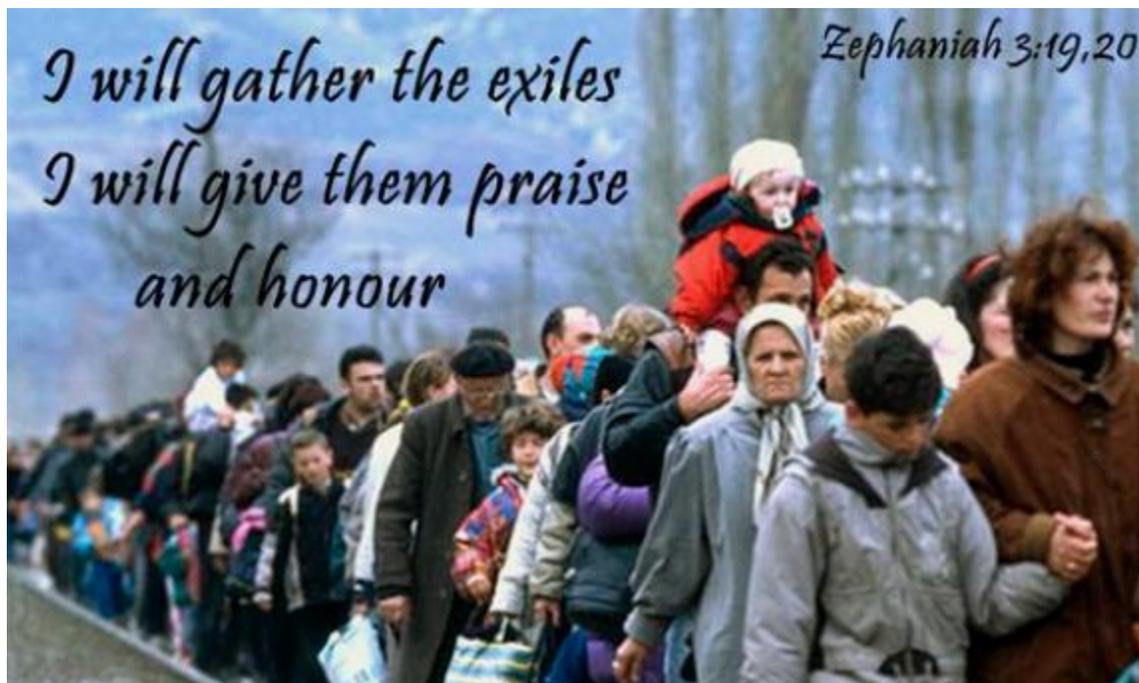
**Zephaniah 3:19 "I will deliver the lame; I will gather the outcast; I will change their shame into praise and fame throughout the earth."**

Although we still have a distance to go, we have come a long way. In 1975, Congress passed P.L. 94-142, the legislation that provided free, appropriate education for all children and youth. My journey into Special Education began when the Wyandotte County Education Cooperative was required to move two classrooms of elementary aged students out of the KU Med Center. These students needed special care as most would likely be classified on the extreme end of the autism spectrum today. Soon after, we opened the Coop's first resource room for learning disabilities followed soon after by a program for gifted and talented students. Then, about 10 years after those groundbreaking programs, I was appointed director of special education services in Center School District.

Little would I have known then that God's promise to watch out for the least among us would become reality. The Son of God whose birth we celebrate set the example by healing the blind, causing the lame to walk, and telling about caring for others.

We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. We know that God is with us and is mighty to save even the least of us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkB81qC1QO4>

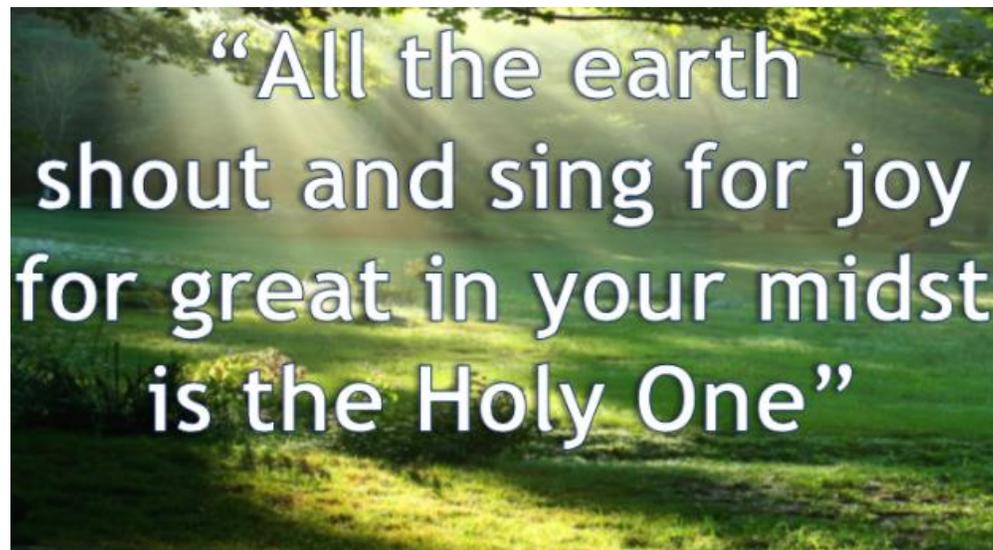


## December 13 16<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent

**Isaiah 12:6 “Shout and sing for joy, city of Zion, because the Holy One of Israel is great among you.**

For those who attend corporate worship services at a church or synagogue, why do you go? Is it to listen and learn from the sermon or homily? Is it to relish in the wonderful musicianship of the choir? Is it to hear the word of God read from the Bible or the Torah? While these are important parts of any worship service, we're really there to WORSHIP God, to perform for Him, to sing loudly to Him, to praise Him. It's not for our entertainment, it is for the Lord's, and, perhaps, practice for when we will join the heavenly host singing to Him in the Highest forever.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DKYPW3VGrE>



**December 14 17<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Isaiah 12:2 “Yah, the Lord is my strength and shield; He has become my salvation.”**

Much is made of the Full Armor of God and is often portrayed as a suit of armor from the Middle Ages. Armed with Salvation, Righteousness, Truth, the Spirit, Faith, and Peace, warriors for God cannot be defeated. Mention of the Lord as my strength brings to mind for many of us the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Whether facing temptation, sickness, or death, the Armor of God can give strength.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-qLa\\_2GPcM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-qLa_2GPcM)



**December 15 18<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Philippians 4:4 “Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad!”**

We are, hopefully, putting the pandemic behind us. In retrospect, and as we found ways to continue with important tasks made even more important, we tried to remain joyful. Collections increased for food pantries. Instead of serving hot lunches, we stepped in with sack lunches. Our support of our mission partners like Rosehill Elementary School and the Argentine Baby Closet increased as we recognized that unemployment, homelessness, and other daily living challenges increased. And now, a week and a few days before we turn our attention to celebrating God’s gift, we can exclaim our joy even more!

Paul wrote to the Philippians under dire circumstances. Imprisoned, snake bitten, shipwrecked...what more could befall him to dampen his spirit? His joy for God never wavered. Be glad always.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMclYOLIXk>



**December 16 19<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

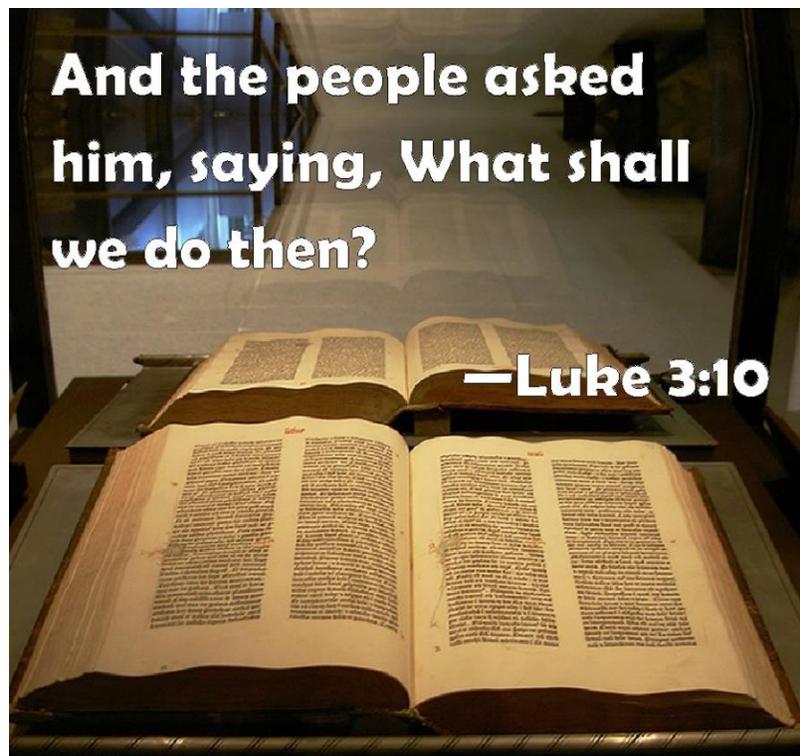
**Luke 3:10 “The crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’”**

“I’m bored! I don’t have anything to do.” How many of us have heard those words from our children? “I’m bored” (although I am surrounded by a closet filled with toys and games, a bookcase full of books, a tablet with hundreds and hundreds of internet programs). Our children lose interest easily and seek parental guidance in what might relieve their monotony. What if they were directed to go through their clothing and pull out items they no longer wanted? What if they were directed to pull out toys, games, and books they no longer used? Would they eagerly give away what they no longer needed?

John the Baptist surprises the crowd with his preaching. He calls them snakes. He tells them they are not worthy descendants of Abraham. And they respond, “What then should we do?” Give to those who need clothes to cover their nakedness. Give to those who need food to sustain themselves.

The Advent of Christ is about giving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omdRd6XGptQ>



## December 17 20<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent

### Luke 3:15 “The people were filled with expectation.”

Year after year, throngs of people filled the streets of the Plaza in Kansas City, waiting to see the switch thrown to turn on the holiday lighting marking the beginning of the winter holiday season. If you have been a part of that event, you know of the growing tension and anticipation among the crowds. Unfortunately, the pandemic erased those crowds in 2020 even though the lights were turned on. Hopefully, their absence will be reversed for years to come as the Plaza lighting event resumes its place as a significant regional and cultural centerpiece.

What would it have been like to witness John the Baptist as he stood there by the Jordan River? Some wondered if John would be like the Savior they expected. Some wondered if John might even be that Savior. His message quickly dispelled their curiosity. “I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming.”

In a way, John’s message was like flipping the Plaza lights switch. The people were filled with expectation and the lights increased their expectations even more, foreseeing the glory and wonder of the holiday season.

Let the marvel of Christ’s birth be upon us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkRiYsTN7KY>

The People Were Waiting  
Expectantly And Were All  
Wondering In Their Hearts  
If John Might Possibly Be  
The Christ.

Luke 3-15

**December 18 21<sup>st</sup> Day of Advent**

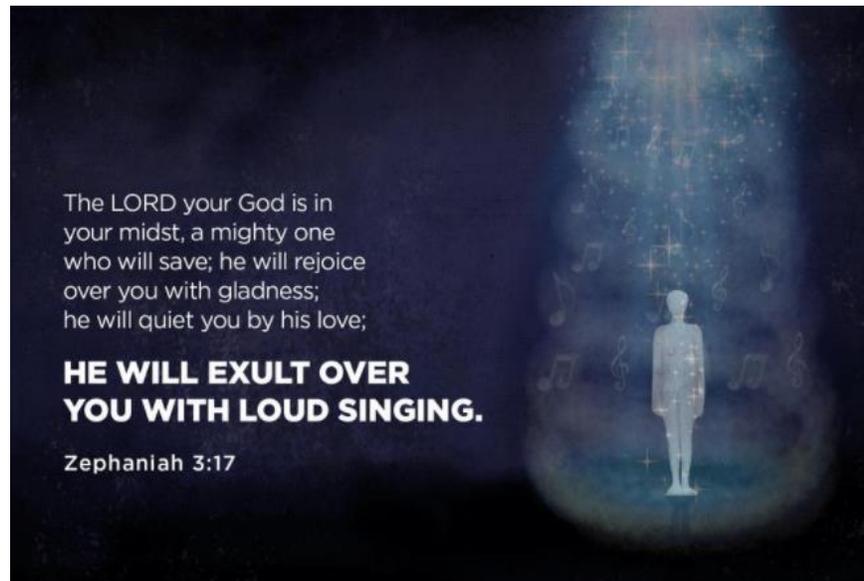
**Zephaniah 3:17 “He will create calm with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing.”**

Do you remember when you were young enough that your parents put you to bed? Tucked you in? Sang lullabies to you? Kissed your forehead and whispered “good night, sleep tight?” Those memories have grown dim in my mind, but they were such cherished moments that some memory of them remains. That soft voice of my dad, that sweet smell of my mom...what calm came over me!

God loves you. God loves me. I can be calm and reflect on our wonderful relationship knowing of His love. To imagine that God would be the one who sings!

I wonder what He whispered in His Son’s ear as Jesus the babe slept?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkkRH3Sa9gw>



## December 19 22<sup>nd</sup> Day of Advent

**Micah 5:2 “One who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you.”**

Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 movie “2001: A Space Odyssey” predicted video calls and Siri-like artificial intelligence—though Siri hasn’t gone murderous like HAL 9000 (knock on wood). 2001 also predicted space tourism, which isn’t real yet, though tech moguls like Richard Branson and Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are working on it. A long list of other movies have accurately predicted the future, although some of those predictions have yet to materialize.

The Old Testament is filled with predictions for the future. Prophets spoke of coming events, many that were accounted in the New Testament. Micah of Moresheth spoke with amazing accuracy that a savior would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, a small village on the West Bank of the Jordan River. Micah’s prediction helped guide the “wise men” to find Jesus even before He was born, although their arrival took place much later. Micah not only was able to prophesy Jesus’ birth centuries before, he predicted that Jesus would return which, of course, has not yet happened.

So, as takes place in fiction-to-fact movies, we await the return.

(You may want to gather your children or grandchildren for the music link below.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwDRmnEooJc>

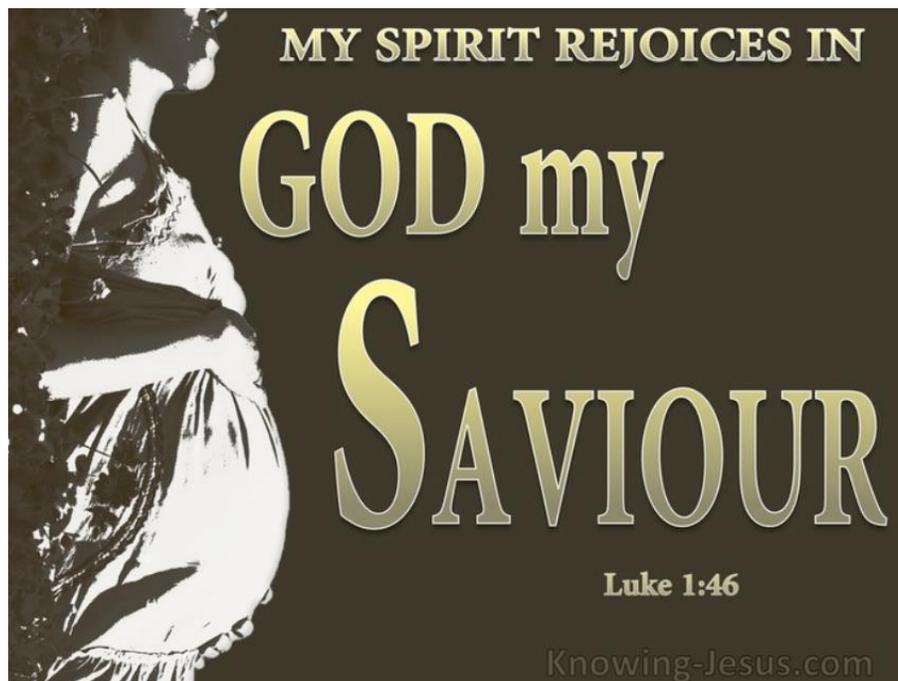


**December 20 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of Advent**

**Luke 1:46 "Mary said, With all my heart, I glorify the Lord!"**

Enjoy the Magnificat of Mary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0y67GDT2kwU>



**December 21 24<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

**Psalm 80:3 “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”**

What a time it has been! Nearly two years of the pandemic that shut down schools, caused job losses, and brought about the deaths of millions worldwide, hope remains to see what normal will look like. Prayers have been offered and pleas for God’s intervention made. Where is our help?

The people of Israel faced hardships and asked for God’s intercession. The message of Psalm 80, though, is that regardless of how much we want God’s help, it isn’t up to us. No amount of praying will change God’s mind, for it is God’s gift and depends completely on Him.

That doesn’t mean prayers should cease. Instead, they should increase even more...prayers of thanks and praise.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 2ZOfuO-z\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 2ZOfuO-z_o)



**December 22 25<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

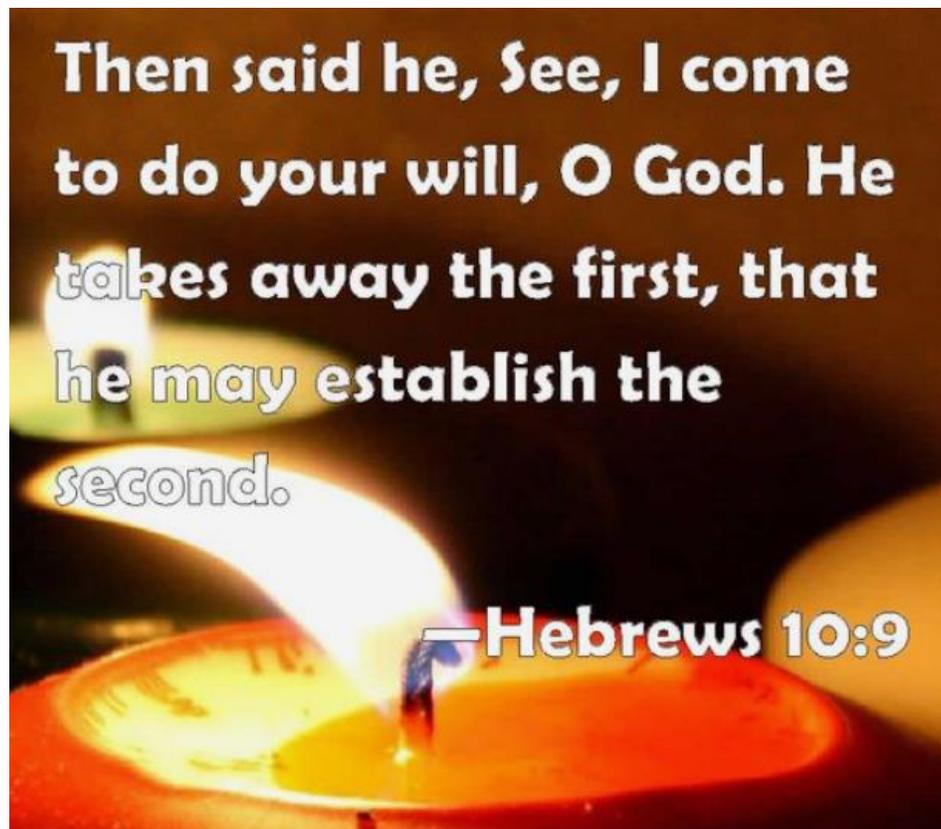
**Hebrews 10:9 "Then He said, 'Look, I've come to do Your will, God.'"**

In earlier times, it was often thought that a child of a Catholic family that dedicated themselves to the priesthood or nunnery would bring honor to the family. In well-to-do families in which the oldest child inherited the fortunes of the parents, becoming a priest or nun often became a necessary career choice. The child, especially males, might also consider the military or, if in a European country during the growth of America, would consider emigration to become a political leader in a young community. In families that weren't wealthy, these career choices provided education and guaranteed income. While these traditions aren't observed much at all today, dedication to the religious world brought about a commitment to doing God's work.

Jesus was committed to His career path. He clearly understood what God wanted of Him. He knew what God's will expected Him to do.

As believers in Christ, are we committed to do God's will?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0dIWJ4t4Jg>



**December 23 26<sup>th</sup> Day of Advent**

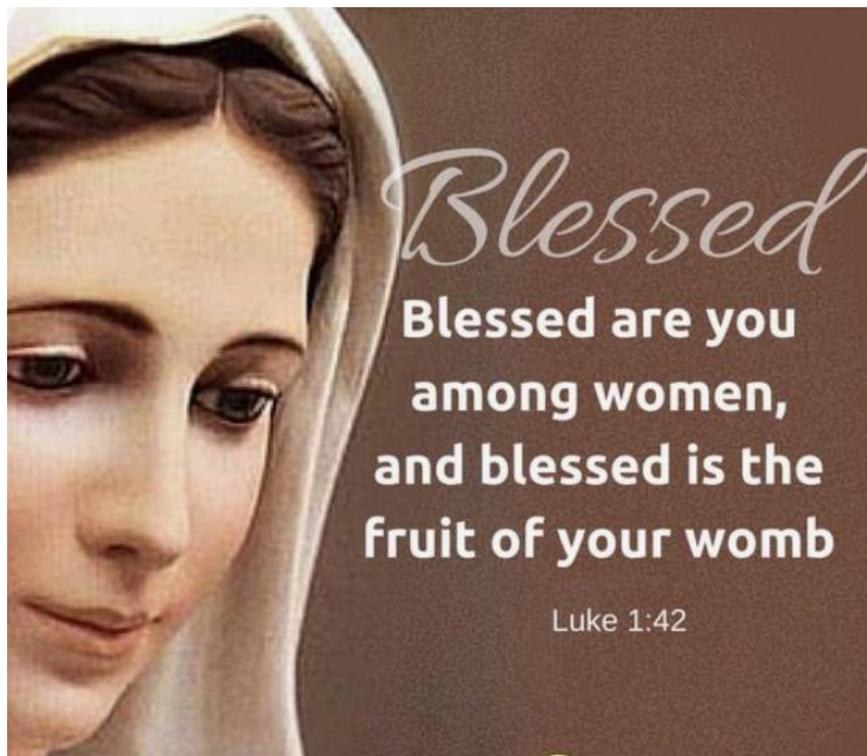
**Luke 1:42 “With a loud voice, she blurted out, ‘God has blessed you above all women, and He has blessed the child you carry.’”**

Expecting. With child. Pregnant. For most, the prenatal time is filled with wonder, doubt, caution, curiosity, and a whole host of other emotions. What should we name the child? Will she be tall? Will he be easy going? Will he favor his father? Will she favor her mother?

Surely, Mary was filled with questions, perhaps, even more than the usual mother-to-be. And now, Elizabeth lays this one on her: “God has blessed you above all women!” And Elizabeth had her own situation with which to deal. The baby she was carrying let her know that he was in the presence of The Great One and years later, his mission would be directly tied to this child.

Glory to The Great One!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0lecljW-zw>



**December 24 Christmas Eve**

**Luke 1:49 "Holy is His name."**

On this the eve of the Holy One's birth, take time to reflect on your own family and give thanks to God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StFAiPzHfIY>



## December 25 Christmas Day

**Luke 2:7 “She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped Him snugly, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.”**

For the Christmas season in 1961, our senior high group at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, KS agreed to participate in an effort to bring some holiday cheer to the downtown business district on Minnesota Avenue. By that time, there was already a creeping abandonment of businesses for several blocks and the merchants who remained thought it would be good to have some of the empty storefronts filled with something other than vacancy signs. We were a resourceful lot and someone came up with a huge piece of cardboard to which we glued sheets of dark blue construction paper. We then used chalk and charcoal to draw a rendering of the Mother Mary, the Madonna, that was then displayed in a large window. If I recall correctly, we were able to shine a spotlight on the makeshift canvas so that passersby could enjoy our artwork day and night. For a bunch of kid amateurs, it wasn't a bad effort.

Today, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, reflect on all that took place in His mother's life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsGvwKz5Dgc>



## December 26 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Christmastide

**1 Samuel 2:26 “Meanwhile, the boy Samuel kept growing up and was more and more liked by both the Lord and the people.”**

Stories often inform us, even when the characters are animals that are anthropomorphized (take on human characteristics). The story of Samuel reminded me of the story, Lion King, in which a young lion cub became the leader of the entire realm. Samuel’s mother, Hannah, prayed for a son and promised God that she would give him to the Lord. Even as a boy under the mentoring of Eli in the temple, Samuel’s Old Testament story had parallels with the boy Jesus. Parents of both Samuel and Jesus left them alone in the temple to learn, teach, grow, and lead. Hannah asked God to grant more children to replace this gift to Him. Having been barren before Samuel’s birth, Hannah also bore more children after Samuel’s birth.

Christmastide reminds us that, now with God’s promise of a birth fulfilled, His Son has work to perform. There’s not much of a stretch to see God’s work in The Lion King’s “Circle of Life.” Enjoy!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GibiNy4d4gc>



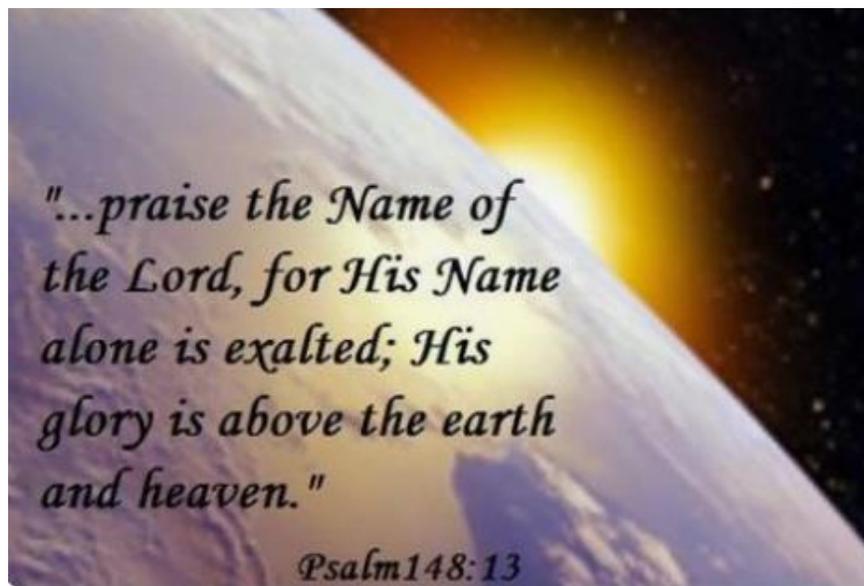
**December 27 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Christmastide**

**Psalm 148:13 "Let all of these praise the Lord's name because only God's name is high over all. Only God's majesty is over earth and heaven."**

We have an ongoing conflict, a conundrum of sorts. In churches everywhere and especially since the disaster of September 11 when Americans rose to the call of unity and patriotism, congregants have wanted to include the display of the Stars and Stripes. In those same Christian sanctuaries, the cross is exhibited as a sign and symbol of the faith. Therein lies the problem: Which one should be more prominent? Flag etiquette indicates that no other symbols should be placed higher while the same criteria is in place for the cross. To whom and to what should we demonstrate our allegiance?

Some churches do not bring the American flag into the sanctuary while others ignore the issue and display both. It is an interesting conversation. Are we to pay honor as the scriptures require? Or are we to demonstrate patriotism?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHq9CJKSeoY>



## December 28 3<sup>rd</sup> Day of Christmastide

**Colossians 3:12** “Therefore, as God’s choice, holy and beloved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”

Many Christian congregations will observe Epiphany which, this year, is Thursday, January 6, by holding “Star Sunday.” Epiphany is that time when we note the arrival of the wisemen to celebrate the newborn Christ child. On Star Sunday, churchgoers receive a paper star on which a word is written. The words are carefully chosen to provide each person with a guide for reflecting during the New Year. Words like those in this scripture passage are most likely among the many that are used. In past years, I have received stars with the words awakening, honor, and enlightenment. My 2021 word was integrity. I post my stars in a prominent place in the kitchen so that I will see them often, almost daily, and think about how my days have gone and how they might go ahead.

As you continue through Christmastide, what word are you expecting if you receive a star word or what word comes to mind that might serve as your guide through 2022?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjQ4sbQuyXw>



## December 29 4<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide

**Luke 2:46 “After three days they found Him in the temple.”**

Have you ever lost a child in a crowd? Have you ever been a child lost in a crowd? I was about 8 years old when walking along the storefronts with my parents and siblings. I was several steps ahead of them, paying little or no attention to them at all but, instead, running my fingers along the plate glass windows. Parents and siblings turned into a store not noticing that I didn't go into the store with them. I continued to walk far enough that it would have been noticeable that here was a young child alone on the sidewalk. A kindly person stopped me to inquire where my parents might be and, at that moment, I realized I was alone. This person walked me back a few storefronts to the place where I could recall seeing them and, fortunately, about that same time, my father came bursting out the store's front door, looking frantically for me. Potential disaster averted!

Jesus, at age 12, separated Himself from His parents. Like all parents would be, they were frantic. After three days and a return trip home to search for Him, they found Jesus in the temple, calmly interacting with the teachers there. His questions amazed them. At times, He was the teacher and they were the students.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-RSHuEdaaA>

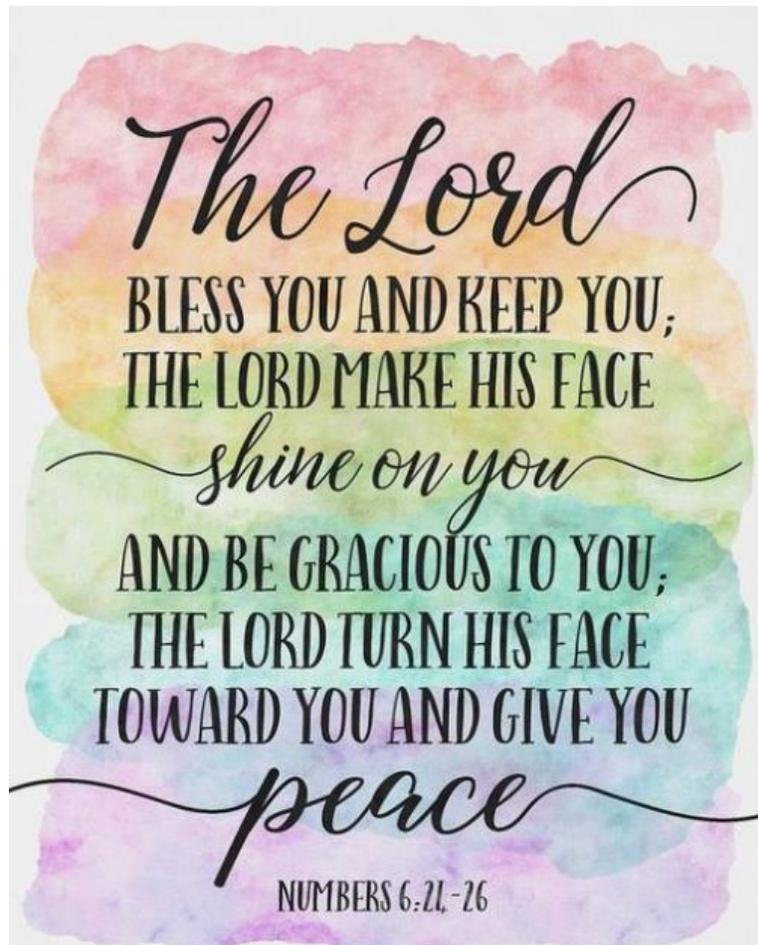


December 30 5<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide

Numbers 6:24-26 “The Lord bless you and protect you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.”

These are the words the Lord spoke to Moses as instruction to the Israelites. Reading the passage without singing the words is almost impossible.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYY9mvjYFUU>

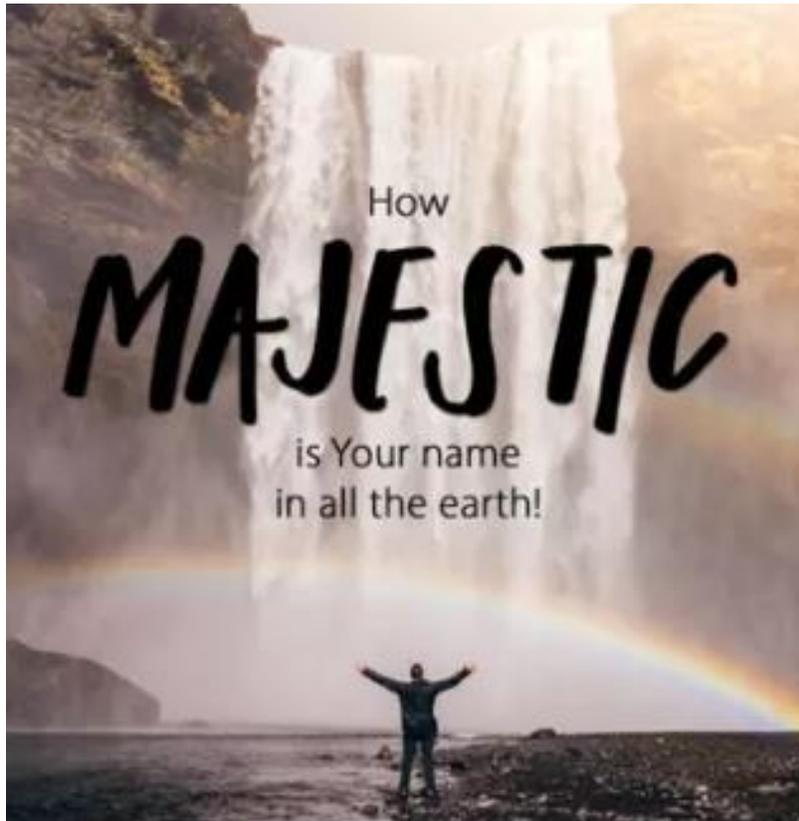


**December 31 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide**

**Psalm 8:1 “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the Earth!”**

Thanks to the wonders of today’s technology, we can view landscapes of distant places that, otherwise, we would not see. We can see the glory of the universe in images taken from outer space. We can see the microscopic creatures that form the basis of our environment. We can see the faces of God’s children across the planet. And how majestic, how marvelous, how wonderful are all of God’s creations!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dugb\\_8SIWU0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dugb_8SIWU0)



January 1 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide

**Galatians 4:4 “God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.”**

When does that happen? At birth? At baptism? At confession? At death? Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, what is it that brings us to the realization that our hearts are filled with the Spirit of Jesus? And, with that Spirit within us, what does God require of us? “To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) As this New Year begins, may the Spirit of God’s Son fill your heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JslfnksE5M>



**January 2 8<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide**

**Philippians 2:8 “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.”**

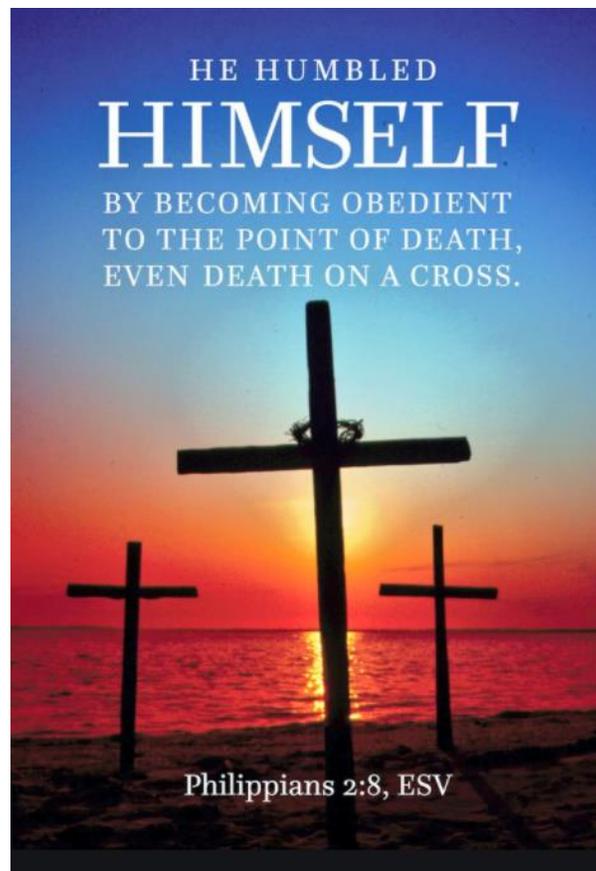
The 7<sup>th</sup> point of the Scout Law states: A Scout is Obedient.

“A Scout follows the rules of his family, school, and troop. He obeys the laws of his community and country. If he thinks these rules and laws are unfair, he tries to have them changed in an orderly manner rather than disobeying them.”

Although the statements contained in the Scout Law have yet to be appropriately modified given that girls may also be scouts, the point of obedience remains. Following the rules and laws are, of course, important expectations for everyone. Jesus, born under the law, was the most perfect, law-following person ever. Born into the world to bring about God’s vision, Jesus provided a perfect example of humility and followed God’s command all the way to the cross.

Could we strive for obedience?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YII4o33rJdA>



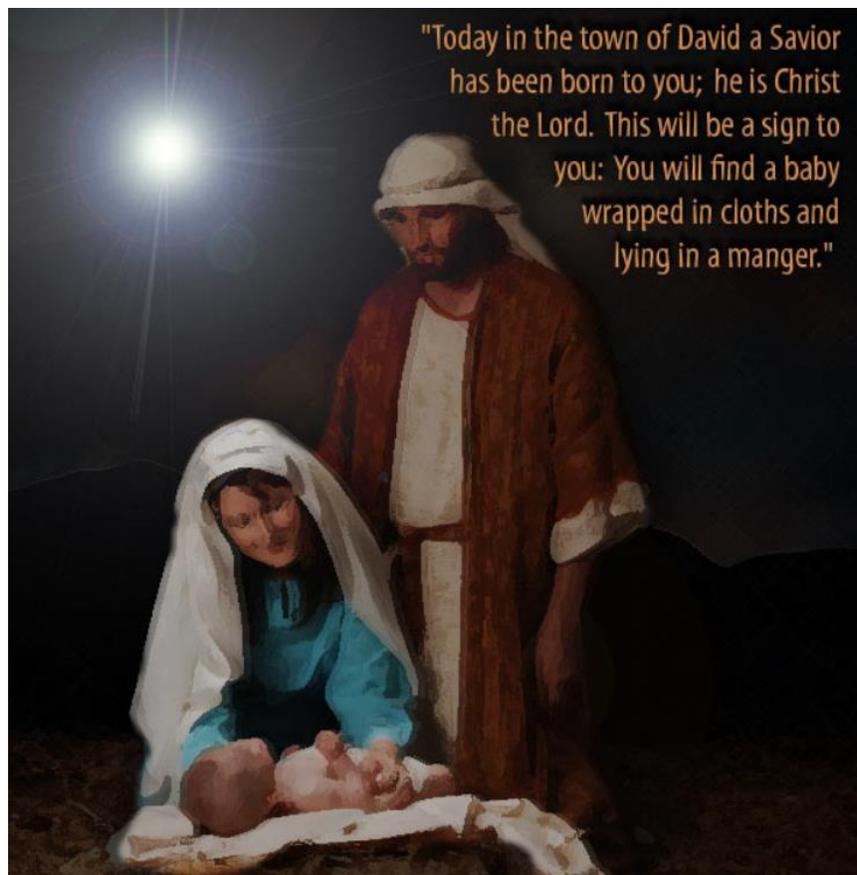
### January 3 9<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide

**Luke 2:12** “This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.”

My younger sister is the consummate volunteer. Before the pandemic, she reported to the NICU at Children’s Mercy Hospital every Friday to hold babies. Fortunately, after a year’s separation, she has returned to holding these babies. Many of the preemies spend weeks and weeks in the unit until they are strong enough to go home with their parents. Many of the parents live out of town and aren’t able to visit their newborns daily, so volunteers like my sister provide that important human touch in their places. I visited this same NICU several years ago when one of our granddaughters spent a few days there and have to say I am amazed by the loving care these little ones receive.

Of course, Jesus wasn’t a preemie, and if He had been, there wouldn’t have been a NICU available for Him. His mother knew to wrap Him snugly those first days and weeks of His life. He probably didn’t spend all of His time in a manger as His mother (and maybe His father) would have known to snuggle Him and cuddle Him and give Him the touches He needed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zVnOKt9jYE>



## January 4 10<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide

**Ecclesiastes 3:1 "There's a season for everything and a time for every matter under the heavens."**

When I served as director of public relations, I attended the annual state commissioner's conference at the Lodge of Four Seasons in the Ozarks. A spectacular place for vacationing, the Lodge boasted high quality golf, boating, swimming, and other activities possible in warm weather. Of course, being "on duty," none of those amenities were included in my schedule. I was always puzzled why this marvelous facility was so named, since seasons that included colder weather couldn't support the Lodge's features.

Not the same with God. You probably can recite at least part of "every matter under the heavens." You can probably sing the song made popular by The Byrds in 1965 after first being written by Pete Seeger in 1959. The song's popularity in the mid '60s was likely increased when some of the final lyrics were added stressing world peace. Other artists, including Judy Collins in 1966, added their renditions.

So, perhaps, the Lodge of Four Seasons wasn't that far off after all!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB6jhbtDUZE>



## January 5 11<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmastide

### Matthew 26:26 "Take, eat, this is my body."

In this time of post-birth and pre-Epiphany, the lectionary doesn't always include passages from the Last Supper; however, we know that in a few weeks, the cycle will move on and the Lenten season will be with us. I have never professed to have the knowledge that those trained in seminary programs might have, and I am willing to admit to a new learning when it comes along. A 2000 movie, "Liam," portrays a young Irish boy in the 1930s whose family has fallen into poverty. As his family are members of the Catholic church and through his attendance in a parish boys' school, Liam is introduced to first confession and first communion. As a 7-year-old, he is trying to figure out life and, as part of the preparation for mass, he is admonished that he should not eat before the communion so that, as the teacher says, "the body of Jesus won't get all mixed in with other less perfect stuff." As Liam's mother fusses over his communion clothing, he reaches for and swallows two bites of food. For this, the priest and his teacher become upset with him. My new learning was that eating before consuming "the body of Christ" was considered a bad thing (I didn't have any Catholic friends growing up). Liam reminded me that the child Jesus came into life to learn new things, to teach others, and to carry out His mission.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-ieO9kqlo0>



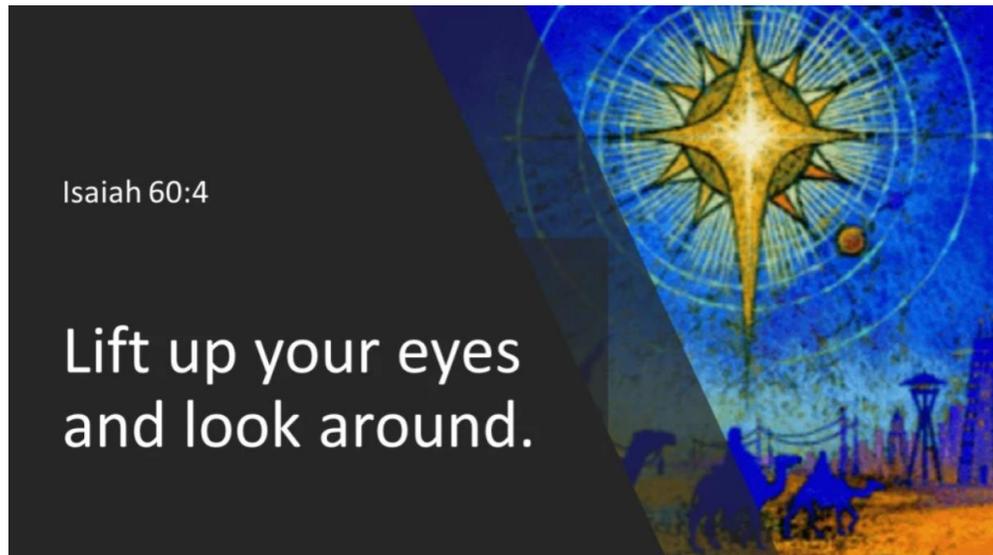
## January 6 Epiphany

**Isaiah 60:4 “Lift up your eyes and look all around: they are all gathered; they have come to you.”**

My, how birthing has changed. When our oldest was born, I waited in the fathers' waiting room until I was called, then was only allowed to stand at the threshold of the delivery room to hear the good news. Only a few years later (and a different doctor and hospital), I participated in pre-delivery classes and was with my wife as she delivered our second child. Of course, I was thrilled to be present and to witness what, to this day, is the most remarkable part of that experience: As my son was placed on a prep table near me, he looked up with eyes wide open and smiled. Of course, being only minutes in his new world, he didn't know what he was seeing and his smile wasn't intentional.

The baby Jesus is greeting His visitors today! Wisemen from the East have come to see Him. The world has been illuminated by You. Praise the Lord!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvUB11kHyiU>

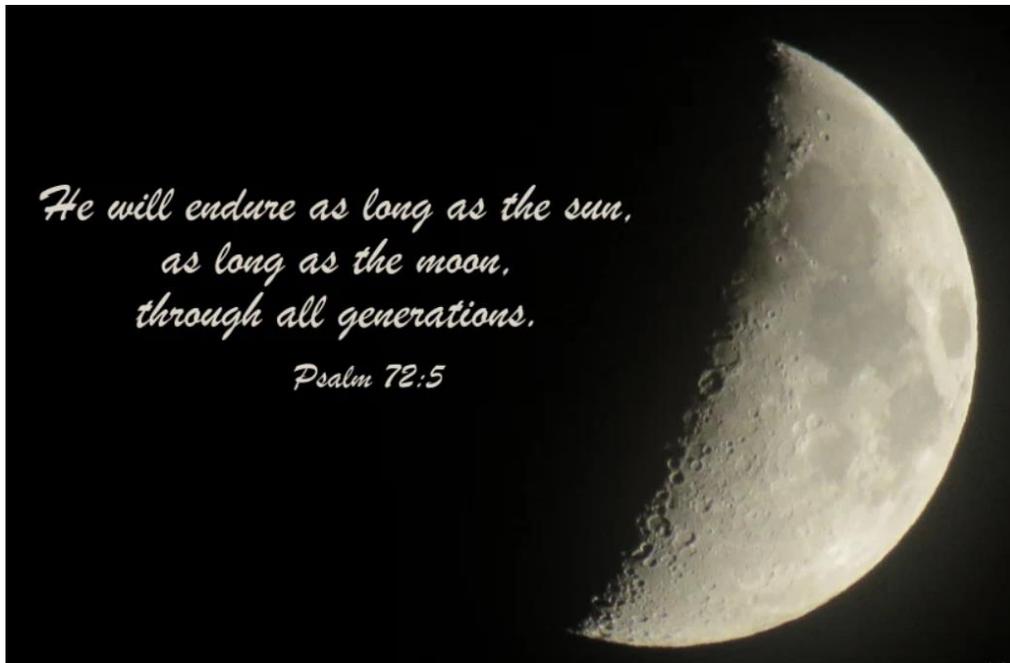


**January 7 1<sup>st</sup> Day after Epiphany**

**Psalm 72:5 "Let the king live as long as the sun, as long as the moon, generation to generation."**

"Long live the king!" Those words are heard when one emperor dies and the next one assumes the throne. In some monarchies such as the United Kingdom where a queen has reigned for decades, her successor if female would hear "Long live the queen!" Of course, before that phrase is pronounced, it is preceded by "The king (or queen) is dead." In history, whether in ancient Roman or Egyptian times or those of the early rulers of Israel, the tenure of the monarch lasted for quite some time in many cases; however, in some, it was only a few years. This passage from Psalms predicting the arrival of a messiah was spot on. Jesus, born to humankind, would live eternal. Long live the king!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pgwTL45a5k>



**January 8 2<sup>nd</sup> Day after Epiphany**

**Acts 8:17 “So Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”**

Churches observe a variety of rites and rituals, some that are similar to one another and others that are different. One that is similar in many churches is the laying on of hands. When leaders are selected for ordination and installation as pastors, elders, and deacons, the ceremony includes others who have been elevated to that rank to come forth and place their hands on the shoulders of those being installed. Prayers are offered and the strength of the laying on of hands symbolizes a ritual that goes back to early times.

Just as those in Samaria received the Holy Spirit from Jesus’ disciples, so, too, do we observe the connections the Holy Spirit brings.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaRH0ItRfZg>



## January 9 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – Star Sunday

**Isaiah 43:2 and 5: “I will be with you...I am with you.”**

As we close the Advent-Christmastide-Epiphany season, we are left with the assurances of the prophet Isaiah that God is with us. He was with the Israelites throughout their trials and hardships. He was with His people down through the ages until today when He is with us. The star that guided visitors to the manger in Bethlehem guides us even now. On this Star Sunday, we receive His blessing and His wisdom to sustain us through the coming year. If you receive a star today, let it light your way. If you don't receive a star word today, find a word that speaks to you from your hopes, your dreams, your values, that can be posted and used for regular reflection throughout the year.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDyQWdzt\\_L8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDyQWdzt_L8)

